



# TRANSFORM YOUR LIFE WITH THE BIBLE'S WAY TO WEIGHT LOSS



**March 2006**

**Matthew 6:33:**

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

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National Director Carole Lewis

Leadership Training  
Director . . . . . Nancy Taylor

Newsletter . . . Sheila Robbins

## Dear Friends,

*Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13*



Carole Lewis  
National Director  
[Carole@firstplace.org](mailto:Carole@firstplace.org)

Encouragement is the second commitment of the First Place program and one that would seem to be the easiest to do of the nine commitments. We commit to encourage one person in our group each week through a phone call, personal note or e-mail. Why is it, then, that every session someone in my group shares that they have never received a contact from anyone in our group?

### Encouraging Takes Time

It takes time to do the First Place commitments. When we join, we must make time to attend a weekly meeting. We carve out time to spend with God in prayer, Bible study and Scripture memory. Time is also needed for exercise, healthy eating and filling out our Commitment Record. The verse above tells us what will happen when we fail to make time to encourage others on a daily basis. "...we will become hardened by sin's deceitfulness." To me, this means that I will miss some great blessings if I fail to encourage others. The Encouragement commitment is designed to help us learn the value of encouraging others and receiving encouragement from others.

Making the time to encourage others is easier when we know and like them already. We find it easy to encourage the one who thinks like we do, but hard to encourage anyone who is different. Lack of time is the excuse we all use to put off something we don't really want to do anyway. Taking the time to encourage someone who needs it, and we all need it, will pay huge dividends.

Oswald Chambers says to, "Beware of being guided by mental or spiritual affinities, let God mix you as He sees fit. Beware of walking in the spiritual life according to your natural affinities. "We all have natural affinities - some people we like and others we do not; some people we get on well with and others we do not. Never let those likes and dislikes be

*(Continued on page 2)*





# Coming Events

## Area Leader's Meeting

### March 11, 2006

9:00 - 12:00 Noon  
Inland Community Church  
Chino, CA  
Cost: \$5  
Contact: Mark Gutierrez  
Email: MarkAndPam@FirstPlaceCA.org

### March 11, 2006

9:30 AM- 11:30 PM  
First Southern Baptist Church  
Overland Park, KS  
Contact: Joe Ann Winkler  
Phone: 816-695-6929  
Email: luvfp@kc.rr.com

### March 18, 2006

10:00 AM - 2:00 PM  
Oakdale Emory United Methodist Church  
Olney, Maryland  
Contact: Kathy Geehreg  
Email: kegeehreg@aol.com

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## Carole Lewis

*(Continued from page 1)*

the rule of your Christian life. I John 1:7 says, "If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another..." God gives us fellowship with people for whom we have no natural affinity."

We have a lady in our class who had serious shoulder surgery which took weeks of physical therapy and months to heal. Two ladies in our class took it upon themselves to drive long distances every week to take this lady to physical therapy. They didn't know her before, but they are now dear friends because they took the time to encourage her by helping her in her time of need.

Why not try encouraging someone this week that you don't know very well? You could be that person "with skin on" that Jesus uses to show His love to them!

### April 8, 2006

9:30 AM  
Church of the Way  
Meridian, Mississippi  
Contact: Beverly Henson  
Email: bev1952@comcast.net

### Australia Leaders Training Weekend Retreat May 12-14, 2006

Theme - "Knowing who we serve"  
Friday 6:00 PM to Sunday 4:00 PM  
The Tops Conference Centre  
The Retreat House  
Stanwell Tops NSW (Illawarra Region)  
Limited to the first 15 registrations.  
Cost is \$100 per person and includes all First Place meals and accomodations. Attendees must make their own travel arrangements. Contact: Barb Lukies  
Email: firstplaceaustralia@yahoo.com.au

## First Place Conference

### September 15-16, 2006

Celebrate: The Heart of Worship  
New Hope Baptist Church, Loveland, OH  
More information coming soon!

## First Place Workshop

### March 4, 2006

9:00 AM - 4:00 PM  
South Australia  
Contact: Tracy Garton  
Phone: 08 83921484  
Email: firstplaceaustralia@yahoo.com.au

## 25th Anniversary Events Celebrating 25 Years of Ministry in 2006

### A Complete 11-day Biblical Tour to Israel

March 20-30, 2006

### Leadership Summit

July 28-29, 2006

### F.O.C.U.S. Week

October 12-19, 2006

### First Place National Conference

September 15-16, 2006

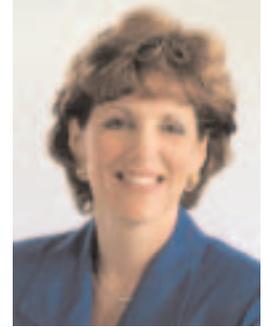
Check website for additional information regarding the 25th Anniversary Events! [www.firstplace.org](http://www.firstplace.org)





## Leadership Training

# Oxygen for the Soul!



**Nancy Taylor**

Leadership Training Director  
ntaylor@firstplace.org

**A**t 6:00 a.m. on a cold Sunday morning in January a pastor brought a devotional from Hebrews 12:1-2. He said, "We are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses today as we run our race."

Encouraging words flowed from his mouth as he spoke to the crowd of anxious runners and walkers. The participants who filled the make-shift chapel were a mixture of novice and elite runners, all with the same need for encouragement, as they prepared to leave the warm room for a long cold journey that would test their fortitude to the max. I was one of the novice runners, preparing to participate in my very first half marathon. Actually it was the first race I had ever participated in as an adult. The words the pastor spoke that morning would play over and over again in my mind as I walked and ran the streets of Houston. He said that the people along the route would be cheering us on and that we should draw strength from them, even reaching out to give some a "high-five" when we needed that extra dose of energy to press on. I did as he suggested and was amazed at how the people truly lifted me and at times pulled me along, just by their smiling faces and cheering voices. What a picture of the First Place encouragement commitment!

John Maxwell describes encouragement as, "oxygen for the soul." I can truly say that on that unforgettable race day I received oxygen for my soul as I took in all the shouts of "Nancy, you can do it!" It would be hard for me to even imagine attempting to run 13.1 miles without at least one word of encouragement. As I trained for the half marathon, I would listen to praise music on my walkman or Ipod. The music was a form of encouragement that kept me going. The music

helped, but the real live people looking me in the eye and calling out my name was what kept me in the race. Just a few yards from the finish line, I heard a very familiar voice. It was my mom, saying, "Nancy, you made it!" Now that really spurred me on to sprint to the finish line! The encouragement from the crowd of strangers did give me energy along the way, but the words from the one who has known me and loved me my entire life, gave me the energy to finish the race.

I learned some valuable lessons on that cold January day about encouragement that I am trying to apply to my First Place leadership.

- ✓ **Personal encouragement means the most.** **Speak to your members using their name.** I am making a point to speak to each person as they walk into our First Place room each week, calling them by name. Then as I ask for prayer requests, I again acknowledge them by name.
- ✓ **A simple touch gives energy and brings healing.** I make it a point to either touch a member on the back, arm or give them a hug, whenever appropriate. As I ran the race, I did draw strength from those who reached out to slap my hand with a "high five." A touch on the arm or a hug is nonverbal encouragement that reaches to the heart. Keep in mind your members learning styles when you give encouragement. Those who are auditory learners will remember what you tell them; those who are visual will be encouraged most

*(Continued on page 4)*





# Nancy Taylor

(Continued from page 3)

by the written note or email, and those who are tactile kinesthetic will know you care by a simple touch. The touch you give will often ease the pain they may be going through, just as the hands of those race day cheerleaders acted as a healing balm to my tired body.

## LEADERSHIP TIP

### A Yearlong Scripture Memory Journey

Make memorizing Scripture fun and enjoyable! It is like dieting – if you can eat foods you really enjoy, then you will stick with it!

First, determine your learning style. If you are an auditory learner, then singing the Scripture memory verses or reading them aloud or recording them will be very helpful in the memorization process. If you are visual, then writing the verses out and repeatedly reading through them will cement them into your mind visually. If you are a tactile kinesthetic learner, or learn by doing, then creating motions for the words, or using sign language will enable you to more easily recall the verse.

After determining your learning style, then associate your scripture memory with a daily task, such as driving to work, walking on the treadmill, or eating lunch. Use these daily tasks as opportunities to memorize and review your verses. Even meal times can be used as a time to share your verse with those at your table. Close email communications by typing in your weekly memory verse, or make a point to say your memory verse every time you brush your teeth.

When my daughter was in high school, she did not have a car so I spent a good deal of time in the car with her as I carted her around to various activities. While in the car, I would have her quiz me on my verses. It was a great accountability tool and provided some teachable moments with my daughter. The bottom line is to make Scripture memory as much a part of your life as brushing your teeth or eating breakfast, and as enjoyable as eating chocolate cake! Jeremiah 15:16

When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O LORD God Almighty.

*Keep Feasting on the Word!*  
Nancy Taylor

✓ **Enthusiastic people give energy to those they encounter.** As the leader, make it your goal to be the most enthusiastic person you know! It is amazing how our attitude influences those we lead. A well-known women's Christian speaker and member of our church, Marge Caldwell, recently went home to be with the Lord. Her funeral was one of the most encouraging events I have ever attended. She was the most enthusiastic person I have ever known. She will be remembered for entering a room with a smile on her face, a twinkle in her eyes and with the words, "I am so excited!" on her lips. She lived her life with enthusiasm for 91 years and influenced thousands! Just by observing her life, I too, want to walk in a room with "I am so excited!" coming from my mouth. Enthusiasm is most definitely contagious!

I have more questions from leaders about how to motivate their members to keep the encouragement commitment than any of the other eight commitments. My answer would be to set the pace and be the leader in the area of encouragement. Call your members by name; reach out to them with a hug or a pat on the back and be enthusiastic about what you are leading them to do. Then before long, they too will be providing that life giving oxygen, called encouragement, to one another.

**Hebrews 10:25**

*Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another-and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

I am so excited!

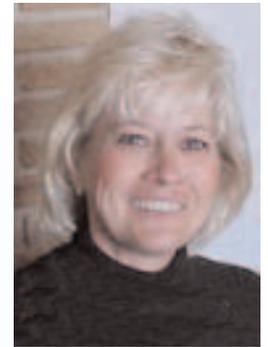
## Lead On! Nancy Taylor





## Bev's Footnotes

# Encourage Thyself For Success



**Beverly Henson**  
Certified Personal Trainer  
[Bevh1952@bellsouth.net](mailto:Bevh1952@bellsouth.net)

*“Courage doesn’t always roar. Sometimes it is the quiet voice at the end of the day saying, “I will try again tomorrow.”*

*Mary Anne Radmacher*

**7**he root word in the word encourage is courage. The antonym or opposite of encourage is discourage. Is your attitude while exercising encouraging or discouraging? The first step to success in exercise is your attitude.

I remember several months back as I was recovering from a long term injury, one of my personal trainer friends called me to see how I was doing and encourage me. She knew I was a bit down because my performance level had dropped. It was a Sunday afternoon and I had just completed a six mile trail walk/jog. Prior to the injury, I could have easily finished this course in an hour or so, but this day it was closer to two hours. As I was on my way home with my head hanging, I made up my mind to change the discouragement to encouragement. I did what Dr Phil calls, “changing your internal dialogue.” I made up my mind to not look back at where I used to be, but to encourage myself where I was at this moment and press on. As I was talking to my friend, I told her I had worked out that afternoon. I told her I did a six mile course alone and then I said to her, “Guess what? I won.” Even though I was slower and more cautious with my steps, just the fact that I was there and did it made me the winner.

How do I encourage myself to get the most out of me? How do I keep my courage level pumped up? How do I encourage myself?

**I** like to start with **2 Corinthians 10:5, ...“bring into captivity every thought to the disobedience to Christ.”** The voice in my head tells me, “You should be doing better by now.” or “Why don’t you just wait and start over Monday?” I take those thoughts from the enemy of my good health into captivity and cast them out or they will take me into captivity. Those thoughts are not the way my Father in heaven talks to me about my health and

exercise. He would never tell me to wait or that I am not working up to par. The way my Father talks to me about my workout is very edifying and encouraging. If it isn’t edifying, it isn’t God! Take it captive.

**2**In **Genesis 1, “God looked at each day of the new creation and said, It is good.”** As I work out and eat healthy, I do just like my Father in heaven did at the end of each day; I look at my new creation of the healthier me and say “It is good.” I feel good about this day. I strive to make every segment of my day good. Imitate your Father.

**3****Acts 17:28 says, “In Him we live and MOVE and have our being.”** It encourages me and motivates me to be able to move my joints, muscles, and body for the Lord.

**4**In **Acts 2:9, “They were all in one accord.”** Find people that are like minded with your health and fitness endeavors to encourage you. Fellowship mentally and spiritually with healthy input through healthy magazines, television shows, and healthy, fit friends.

You are one of God’s unique creations. *“He is the Glory and the lifter of my head.”* Psalms 3:3 Lift your spirits and encourage yourself in the Lord. Dr. Seuss says, “There is no one alive who is more ‘youer’ than you.”

### Tip

Check out this web site and activity calorie counter. It is very good!  
<http://www.primusweb.com/fitnesspartner/index.html>

## Bev Henson



## Hints & Pinches

# Spring Into Action and Break the Junk Food Rut!

**Scott Wilson**

First Place Food Consultant  
*firstplacechef@hotmail.com*

Scott Wilson is a certified executive chef with the American Culinary Federation.



We are sad to announce that Scott Wilson, who has been self-employed for many years, has taken a full-time position as a chef at an assisted living facility and will no longer be contributing to our newsletter each month. In honor of Scott's wonderful First Place ministry through his articles and recipes, we will re-publish the "best of the best" of Scott's articles for the next few months.

**9**n First Place there are no taboo foods; however, as with other circumstances in our lives, there are times when we can make better choices. We know why they call it junk" food — it has little, if any, nutritional value and is often high in calories, fat, sodium, sugar, and refined flour — yet we eat it anyway. We like it, even though we may feel guilty after we indulge. The fact is: an occasional bag of potato chips or fast-food burger with the works won't kill you, but when junk food becomes a regular part of your diet, it can interfere with your nutritional health. (Junk food can fill you up so that you don't feel like eating more nutritionally balanced meals.) So, if you're a junk food junkie, try these tips for breaking your habit.

Start gradually, making one change at a time. If you give yourself time to adjust to new habits, you'll be more likely to keep up with them. You won't feel as if you're depriving yourself and with each successful step, you'll be motivated to follow through with the next. If you are like most people, it would be unrealistic to think that junk food will never pass your lips again. But, its very realistic — and healthful — to make simple changes in your eating habits to help limit the amount of junk food you eat.

The key to First Place menu planning is variety and moderation. Our bodies need numerous nutrients and vitamins to make us healthy, and at this time the majority of fast-food establishments do not provide those items. Most of them have tried so-called healthy alternatives, but the general public did not buy them. Businesses are in

business to make a profit and if an item does not sell, they have to get rid of it. Yes, I know you can still find an occasional salad or grilled chicken breast sandwich, but all in all, you really have to search for good choices.

As far as the cost of eating, if you were selling millions of turkey pita wraps each day, you could bring the cost of the sandwich down, too. When you are planning your menus each week, You are planning your menus, aren't you? Why not cook enough for "planned-overs." Roast an extra chicken or sirloin to have later in the week for sandwiches and even soups, or prep extra vegetables and place in plastic bags to have on hand for snacking, or tossing in a skillet, or on the grill to make veggie wraps or top other sandwiches.

Why wait? Junk food should be the exception — not the rule — for healthier eating habits. You may even discover that "real" food isn't half bad, and with a little planning, you can come up with several meal plans to carry you throughout the year. Below you will find several make-ahead lunch ideas that you will find both economical and a little different to get you out of that ho-hum fast-food rut.

### TIPS ON BREAKING THE JUNK-FOOD RUT

- ✓ Begin by switching to the low-salt variety of your favorite snack chip or crackers- it's a start!
- ✓ If you are quite certain that you can't live without candy, save it for a special occasion rather than an everyday indulgence. (For instance, you might allow yourself one candy bar on one day only.)
- ✓ Choose popcorn instead of potato chips for a quick snack. (First, try your popcorn without the added butter; then try it without the added butter or salt.) There are several good microwave options available.

*(Continued on Page 7)*





# Scott Wilson

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- ✓ Pretzels (unsalted) are a better choice than chips since they are lower in fat.
- ✓ At fast food restaurants, opt for a plain burger rather than deep-fried chicken and fish sandwiches, or share a portion with a friend.
- ✓ Instead of sodas, mix 1/2 cup fruit juice with 1/2 cup plain carbonated water or sodium-free seltzer.
- ✓ When you have pizza, at least eliminate the high-fat meat toppings (sausage, pepperoni, meatballs), and try bell pepper, onion mushroom, or a combination of vegetable toppings. Also, ask for extra sauce and less cheese.

## Pita Pizza

*Serves: 1*

- 1 6-7 inch whole-wheat pita round
- 2 tablespoons prepared spaghetti sauce
- 1/4 cup chopped broccoli
- 1/4 cup sliced mushrooms
- 1 tablespoon jarred sliced roasted red pepper
- 2 tablespoons shredded part-skim Mozzarella cheese
- 5 slices turkey pepperoni

Preheat oven to 450 degrees. Spread sauce on pita round and top with remaining ingredients in order listed. Bake for 8-10 minutes or until crisp and cheese is melted. Slice and enjoy.

**Exchanges: 1 meat, 2 breads, 1/2 vegetable, 1 fat**

## Open-faced Italian Turkey Stack

*Serves: 4*

- 2 2-ounce Italian sub rolls, split and cut in half, toasted
- 1/4 cup fat free Italian dressing
- 3 ounces thinly sliced deli-style turkey
- 3 ounces turkey pepperoni
- 2 ounces shredded part-skim Mozzarella cheese
- 1 cup thinly jarred sliced roasted red pepper
- 1 cup romaine leaves
- 1 large tomato sliced

Top each sub with 1 tablespoon dressing and equal portions of the remaining ingredients in the listed order.

**Exchanges: 2 meats, 1 bread, 1 vegetable, 1/2 fat**

## Roast Beef & Roasted Pepper Sandwiches

*Serves: 4*

- 1 tablespoon light mayonnaise dressing
- 1 tablespoon Deli-style mustard
- 1 teaspoon prepared horseradish
- 2 6-7 inch Italian flatbread or whole-wheat pocket pita
- 6 ounces thinly sliced cooked roast beef
- 1/4 cup jarred roasted red peppers, thinly sliced
- 2 ounces shredded reduced-fat Monterey Jack cheese
- 2 cups fresh baby spinach leaves

Combine mayonnaise dressing, mustard, and horseradish in a small bowl. Cut each pita in half and open pockets. For each sandwich, spread about 2 teaspoons of mixture in each pocket. Fill each pocket with about 1-1/2 ounces of roast beef, 1 tablespoon sliced peppers, 1/2 ounce cheese and 1/2 cup spinach leaves. Do not make overnight as the pita will become soggy. Enjoy with some carrot sticks & a piece of fruit.

**Exchanges: 2 meats, 1 bread, 1/2 fat**

## Veggie Wraps

*Serves: 4*

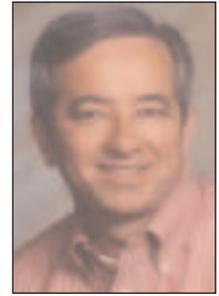
- 1 red sweet bell pepper, seeded and cut into 1/2-inch wide strips
- 1 green bell pepper, seeded and cut into 1/2-inch wide strips
- 1 small yellow squash and 1 small zucchini, cut lengthwise into 1/4-inch thick slices
- 1 medium red onion, cut into 1-inch wide wedges
- 1 teaspoon olive oil
- 4 12-inch tomato or other flavored flour tortillas
- 1/4 cup light ranch-style dressing
- 2 ounces shredded reduced-fat Monterey Jack cheese
- fresh ground black pepper to taste

(You can prepare this recipe as a side dish omitting the last 3 ingredients and use remainder to make the wraps)

In a large bowl toss the prepared vegetables with the oil. Place vegetables in a grill basket and grill over medium high heat for about 5 minutes or until crisp-tender. Spread one side of a tortilla with 1 tablespoon of the ranch dressing and sprinkle with 1/2 ounce of the shredded cheese and black pepper. Top with about 3/4 cup of the grilled vegetables. Roll the wrap and cut in half diagonally in the center. Repeat with remaining wraps if desired. Either grill the wraps to heat or microwave them for 20 seconds to reheat.

**Exchanges: 1/2 meat, 2 breads, 1 1/2 vegetables, 1 fat**





# It's My Turn

**Dr. Bill Heston**

*bheston@fpchouston.org*

Dr. William Heston was minister of pastoral care at Houston's First Baptist Church; clinical member of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, and a marriage therapist licensed by the state of TX. He has also led seminars at First Place Conferences.\* Bill is on staff of First Presbyterian Church of Houston, Texas

**R**ecently, I was in the grocery line purchasing one pack of flour tortillas. The lady in front of me looked like she was on the way home from work, just like me. Her basket was full. She glanced at my single purchase and asked, "Is that all you have? Go ahead." As I stepped in front of her with much acknowledged appreciation, the lady next to the checkout had me move ahead of her, with the statement that she was retired and not on any schedule. I was out of there in record time and had a great attitude – not normal for my grocery trips – because of the simple acts of kindness that both of those ladies have surely forgotten [unless they told their friends about the "pitiful man" in the shopping line]. They may have forgotten, but I have not. May I be more like them: sensitive to others, willing to give up some of my time for someone else and willing to do the small acts of kindness to make life easier for someone else.

## Everybody needs someone to encourage them most of the time.

The last place people look for help during difficult experiences often-times is among people of faith. This may be due to feelings of guilt on the struggler's part. If they are believers, they may think they should not have difficulties, or at least not admit that they are troubled by them. If they are not believers, they may not have a clue as to the power of faith in times of darkness. It is the role of those who are on the spiritual journey to reach out to those who need the hope that faith can bring.

The weekly personal contacts and the weekly meetings that are part of the First Place commitments are deeply rooted in the encouragement taught in scripture. The writer of the book of Hebrews stated it powerfully:

*"Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching."* Hebrews 10:23-25 [NIV]

The word for encourage in this passage is the same Greek word often translated in other passages for the Holy Spirit. It literally means to "walk along with." What a great picture of encouragement. What does it take to walk along with another person?

**1 Notice – See the person.** That may seem obvious, but how many times do we pray for opportunities to make a difference in someone's life and go through weeks without seeing the people God places in our way?

**2 Sensitive – Feel with them.** We may not always know what or why a person is feeling a specific way but we can have an awareness of what others may be experiencing and be willing to truly listen.

**3 Pace – Let others lead.** If we are to walk with others, we may need to slow down what we are doing and get in step with those God would have us to help, not too fast and not too slow, but as wanted and needed.

**4 Direction – Have a sure path ourselves.** Be certain that we are on a sure spiritual journey in order that we may lead others through tough places we have traveled and learn lessons we have learned.

First Place gives the structure to be "walk along with" people. It is a journey of those who have and are traveling a life journey that has difficulties and victories. An encourager is a fellow traveler sharing the way as we go in faith.

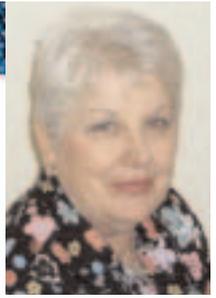
When the ladies saw me in the grocery line, they saw someone who was tired, disgusted and out of place. Their allowing me to go ahead of them was a gift gratefully received.

It also caused me ask to myself when I had done even that small of a thing for someone else, expecting nothing in return?

I am looking for "pitiful people" like myself who need a break...it's my turn.

**Dr. Bill Heston**





## Winning Words for First Place Losers

*The Sovereign Lord has given me an instructed tongue, to know the word that sustains the weary. He wakens me morning by morning, wakens my ear to listen like one being taught.*

Isaiah 50:4-5

**S**hortly after joining First Place, I decided to take Hebrews 3:12-13, which encourages us to encourage one another daily, to heart. Writing is my joy and my passion, as is scripture memory and collecting inspirational quotes. So I asked God to use me to strengthen the others in my little First Place group through a ministry of written-word encouragement. The next morning I began sending each person in my First Place group a daily encouragement message. Each daily message began with a Bible verse, followed by a brief writing applying that passage to the First Place program and ended with an inspirational quote that reinforced the scripture and the First Place application. Because my group called themselves First Place Losers, I called the mini-devotional messages Winning Words for First Place Losers. Those who received those early messages know just how humbly this ministry began! By God's grace they saw the motive of my heart and not the errors in my typing and grammar. And, as is always the case, God answered my simple "please use me as a First Place encourager" prayer in ways far beyond my ability to ask, or even imagine. What began two years ago as a daily e-mail encouragement to seven women has increased over a 100 fold! Today Winning Words for First Place Losers goes out to over 700 First Placers every morning, and God is using this simple ministry to touch hearts in need of strength, encouragement and hope as they strive to put God first in all things. (Not only did God increase my daily transmission list seven fold, He graciously provided my dear First Place sister, Kathy St. Jean, as my eagle-eyed proofreader!)

If that had been the only way God answered my prayer to be a First Place encourager, I would have been truly blessed! But God had more in store for me than I bargained for. What seemed so easy in the beginning turned out to be a double edged sword! To encourage is quite literally to fuse courage into another, which meant if I was going to

### Elizabeth Crews

Addictions Counselor & Educator  
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Elizabeth Crews is a licensed addictions counselor & educator, a Bible teacher and a First Place Networking leader in San Diego, CA. To subscribe to Winning Words for First Place Losers—a free daily e-mail devotional written by Elizabeth—write to [firstplaceloseers@cox.net](mailto:firstplaceloseers@cox.net) and ask to be added to the First Place devotional subscriber's list.

encourage others daily, I was going to have to let God encourage me! The words of Isaiah 50:4-5 echoed in my heart and mind. It was God's word flowing through me that would sustain the weary, not my clever way with words. Only as I allowed Him to fill my cup would it overflow with encouragement to strengthen others. I began asking God what weary First Place hearts needed to hear, and I began getting answers! I even gave Him permission to wake me up in the early morning hours so I could hear His voice—and much to my chagrin He took that wake up call literally! Why do I get up at 3:30 every morning? That's when my Master's class begins. How thankful I am that the God of heaven and earth is willing to speak to me so that I can bring His encouragement to those who are seeking a right relationship with Him through the First Place program. God does indeed sustain those who are putting Christ first in all aspects of their lives—especially self care that reflects their love for the One who came so that they could have life and health and wholeness.

Encouragement is the second commitment of First Place. It is also God's way of using each one of us to speak His words to hearts in need of His love, mercy and grace. Please take some time today to encourage the members of your First Place group. Encouragement is truly like throwing a pebble in a pond. This side of heaven you will never know just how far the ripples of encouragement spread as God uses your humble words to encourage a weary soul fighting a battle few understand. Today I encourage you to encourage others to show their love for Jesus by obeying His command that they practice diligent self care as a reflection of His care for them.

## Elizabeth Crews





# First Place Success Story

**M**y First Place journey really began 32 years ago when at age 8, it was determined that I was a “chubby” child. Upon that realization, my mother put me on various and sundry food plans. None of these were terribly successful in helping with my weight, but they did firmly establish the idea that some foods are good and some are bad, and helped to create the “fat person” mentality that I still struggle with today. Unfortunately, none of my food plans also included an increased activity level. I was told to be careful about what I ate, but was not expected to exercise on a regular basis. Since I was very uncoordinated and hated to play sports, but loved to read, not being expected to be active was fine with me.

By the time I was in my late teens, my mother and I joined another weight loss plan and I was able to successfully lose the “baby fat.” As a freshman in college, I had to take a PE class entitled “Fit for Life.” In this class we had to determine an exercise regimen and keep a daily exercise journal. In subsequent PE classes, I was able to choose fun types of exercise, such as Jazzercise and Modern Dance. This began my enjoyment of physical activity and movement. As the behavior management part of my eating wore off, I began to control my weight with more and more strenuous exercise programs. In my twenties, I would eat whatever I wanted, as long as I made sure that I had time for vigorous daily workouts of at least one hour. When my eating was really out of control, I would engage in strenuous aerobic exercise for as much as ninety minutes a day!

This particular lifestyle was perfectly suited for a single woman in her twenties, but once I got married and started having children, I no longer had the time (or the energy) to work out for ninety minutes a day. Teaching full time, caring for



identical twin sons and keeping up a household left me no time to care for my body—or my own emotional, mental or spiritual well-being. In the absence of self-care, the struggle with my weight quickly resurfaced. Then, when my marriage fell apart and I found myself a single mother with two young sons, I needed to work full time and go back to school to earn an advanced degree and better my income. Forget about eating right or exercising for even nine minutes a day! Forget about anything but sheer survival!

I could have been content with my new, fat self, except for my vanity. After all, I was only 40 pounds overweight, and at 5’9” tall, that didn’t put

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# Success Story

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me in the “obese” category. But I had always hated being the “fat kid” and now I was becoming a “fat adult,” and I hated that too. Rather than admit the truth about my out of control eating, I decided there must be something medically wrong with me. I weighed almost 200 pounds, even though I had begun to exercise daily again--now that my sons were older and I had completed my Master’s Degree studies--and I wasn’t really eating that much! Certainly this steady weight gain was not my fault! My doctor confirmed my suspicions by diagnosing me as having an irritated thyroid that would make losing weight difficult for me. The diagnosis gave me some satisfaction, but no real relief. Medical diagnosis or not, I was gaining weight and feeling worse and worse about myself. And, as is always the case, my eating was not the only out-of-control part of my life. My emotional life was a roller coaster ride and my relationship with Jesus Christ was not what I knew it should be either. I had been praying for a better Bible study and a way to spend more time with the Lord.

Well, in August of 2003, my prayers were answered. My mother decided to start a Bible study/weight loss program entitled “First Place” at our church. I was skeptical at first, but then decided that I really had nothing to lose and decided to join her, more to support my mom than because I thought it would help my situation. Our first meeting was dismal. All the other members of our fledgling First Place group were my mother’s age, with much more weight to lose than I. But instead of becoming discouraged, their situation gave me increased motivation to shed the excess pounds before, like them, I found myself in my 60’s, with 80 plus pounds to lose. I began First Place, with the goal to lose 30 pounds, and I started faithfully following the nine commitments of First Place. Being a high school mathematics teacher by

profession, I loved the logical, sensible approach of the Live It plan and the idea of balance in all areas of my life. By December of 2003, I had lost 30 pounds and went on to lose another 10 by early spring, making a total of 40 pounds. Not only do I have more energy and vitality, I have been able to maintain my weight, in spite of my “irritable” thyroid and my busy life, for over two years.

I can honestly say that the First Place program has totally transformed my life. I have learned better eating habits, ways to exercise without killing myself, and have more balance in my life. I am a much calmer person and have much more inner peace. I did join the program out of vanity, because I wanted to lose weight, but the other benefits have been so much more rewarding. I am truly becoming a new creature in Christ and am no longer ruled by my appetite or unbalanced emotions.

**Sheri Soldau**  
**Chula Vista, CA**

## More Houston Marathon Participants



Sandy Matthews; Melody Lutz; Dee Matthews; Bob Matthews

